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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KHARTOUM 000480

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DEPARTMENT FOR D, AF A/S FRAZER, AF/SPG, SE WILLIAMSON, NSC
FOR BPITTMAN AND CHUDSON, ADDIS ABABA PLEASE PASS TO USAU

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SUBJECT: SUDANESE DEFENSE MINISTER: WE WANT A BETTER
RELATIONSHIP WITH U.S.

REF: KHARTOUM 474

Classified By: CDA Alberto M. Fernandez, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In a surprising conversation after a two year boycott, Sudanese Defense Minister Abdel Rahim Hussein told CDA Fernandez that Sudan was strongly in favor of a better relationship with the United States. He gingerly accepted that "mistakes were made" in Darfur, called for greater American engagement with the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), and promised to tell the Americans "our side of the story" on issues such as Abyei, Darfur and the SPLA. Hussein said that Sudan would consider whether to assign a SAF DATT in Washington and would welcome military visits, such as by CJTF HOA leadership, "if the Sudanese political leadership agrees." He warned that the SPLA's massive defense expenditures risk destabilizing Sudan and the South and that the SPLA's free movement and rearmament are a clear violation of the CPA. End summary.

STRONG WILL FOR BETTER TIES

¶2. (C) Almost six months after it was requested, CDA Fernandez had his first meeting with Sudanese Minister of Defense Lieutenant General Abdel Rahim Mohammed Hussein on April 1st. CDA was accompanied by DLO and POL chief to MOD HQ for Hussein's first meeting with US officials in almost two years. The scheduled 30 minute meeting lasted 70 minutes, almost all of it in Arabic between Hussein and Fernandez. The Minister said he was glad to welcome the Charge, belatedly, to Sudan. He felt he already knew the Charge from Arab Television appearances. Hussein said that Sudan appreciated the US's role as a "witness" to the CPA and positive American efforts in securing the 2006 Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA). Sudan wanted to see a more balanced American role on Sudan's problems and in the troubled relationship between the National Congress Party (NCP) and the Sudan Peoples' Liberation Movement (SPLM). He said that "there is a very strong will and intention by Sudan to improve relations with the US, and the SAF shares that view."

¶3. (C) The Minister noted that there are problems in Darfur, although it is better than it has been in the past. There seemed to be no American appreciation of Sudan's efforts to correct past mistakes. "We are not saying that you should agree with a 100 percent of what we say or do, but if we are trying, and if we are only 50 percent right, you should acknowledge this and give us credit for changing our behavior". Sometimes we do the right thing and we don't even

hear thank you, he added. He noted that American forces sometimes kill innocent people by mistake in Iraq and Afghanistan, admit it and apologize, "these things happen in war and we are being attacked in Darfur." We know that "mistakes were made" but we are trying to correct them.

¶4. (C) Charge Fernandez thanked the Minister for Sudan's cooperation and help in making the rapid transport by USAF planes of 800 Rwandan peacekeepers happen in October 2007 without a hitch. This showed that Sudan and the U.S., and both militaries, can work together towards a common good, which is providing better security in Darfur. CDA admitted that there was sometimes disagreement in what actually happens in Sudan and there are ways that the SAF can seek to remedy the situation. For example, greater and deeper contact between the DLO and the Sudanese military or Sudan can assign a Defense Attache in Washington. We would welcome such a move. CJTF HOA's senior leadership is also interested in visiting and this could possibly be within the context of trying to get some modest help with the Joint Integrated Units (JIUs).

SAF BRUTALITY IS A PROBLEM

¶5. (C) Charge continued that it was true that, in some ways, things have improved in Darfur. The number of innocents dying has decreased every year since the events of 2003-2005 and that is good. But while we respect and acknowledge the sovereign right of Sudan for self-defense, there is a problem of disproportionate response. When JEM attacked and seized part of West Darfur, Sudan had every right to attack but there was a high civilian cost, perhaps unintentionally, in

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both deaths and in IDPs. The international press may have magnified this but this was true and was caused by both the use of irregular forces and by aircraft bombing. Sudan may feel that it is being judged unfairly by a special standard, but that is the reality. Despite no exchange of information with the SAF, we were able to learn that the SAF was not entirely to blame. We learned that the rebels had committed some crimes, and that local people generally prefer the presence of the better disciplined SAF over pro-government irregular forces or rebels. Some IDPs had returned. So we tried to be fair in our analysis and criticism. On the SPLM/SPLA, CDA noted that we provide limited non-lethal support and training for the SPLA in strict adherence to the letter and spirit of the CPA, to shift it from a guerrilla army to a regular force.

¶6. (C) The Minister said that there were problems with the SPLA. Per the UN, the SAF had almost entirely redeployed from the South by the SPLA had not. "You know this is true from the AEC Security Working Group." Not only had the SPLA not redeployed south but it was aggressively pushing north. In Abyei the SPLA was fighting the Miseriyya Arabs and many civilians have been killed by them. "We are under political pressure to intervene, there are elections next year, the Miseriyya want to know, why can't you defend us?" The SAF realizes that if they intervene, they could begin fighting with the SPLA "and the whole border would explode and the CPA collapse." So the SAF is facing two urgent, dangerous pressures, "save the CPA or save the Miseriyya." He noted that the CPA gave the SAF "every right" to move around in the North, and that includes Abyei, while the SPLA had no right to be there, outside the JIUs, but the SAF was, so far, exercising self-discipline.

¶7. (C) "The SPLM is ruling the South through its Army," the Minister continued, there is not much of a state in South Sudan aside from the SPLA. Not only is the SPLA aggressively pushing north, and initialing buffer zone agreements that it doesn't keep but it also moves freely throughout the South which is a violation of the CPA which called for SPLA units

to be concentrated in camps. American training and support should not be for the SPLA alone, in his view, but for the JIUs which will form the "core of a future united army". The South admits to 40 percent of its budget going for the SPLA "but we have it from trustworthy sources that it is 75 percent. This is actually the biggest threat to unity," because instead of these massive funds going for development, the money goes for a large armed force whose cost and existence must be justified. Southerners do not see the fruits of peace despite \$3 billion dollars transferred to South Sudan since the peace treaty was signed. There is ten times more money per citizen going to South Sudan than to North Sudan, but there is no development there. In the north, you see roads being paved, bridges built. The number of universities has increased from two to 26 and number of college students from 15,000 to 370,000. The SPLA is not even used to build roads but rather kept on a war footing.

PLAYING WITH FIRE IN JUBA

18. (C) "They are guerrillas who don't know how to handle such billions," the Minister continued. "They lack honest administration." Hussein criticized the SPLA's supposedly *secret* purchase of Ukrainian T-72 tanks, there are 40 more waiting at the port in Mombasa "bought illegally and at two to three times the price," and said that the SAF knew the SPLA was also purchasing helicopter gunships. He offered to share this information with the U.S. The Southern Army has 160,000 men and is not downsizing. The Minister added that the SAF and NCP will accept the results of the 2011 referendum "no matter what" but if separation does occur they want a calm, stable neighbor that will be friendly and that will not export its problems outside its borders. The SPLA could well become a coercive vehicle for Dinka domination of a fractious South. He noted that North Sudan would not be immune from these problems, more Southerners fled north during the civil war than into Uganda and Kenya. "They are everywhere in the North," he described the population of Wadi Halfa, in Sudan's extreme northern border with Egypt as "25 percent southerner."

19. (C) CDA Fernandez noted that while we are indeed sympathetic to the SPLM, we do recognize that they have their

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own problems in building up the South from scratch and managing ethnic tensions. We listen to them and it is easy to have a relationship with them, we have "one side who talks to us, presents their position and on the other side, a vacuum." Hussein answered that the MOD would begin filling that vacuum. He then turned to the DLO and told him, "feel free to contact us at any time and we will do the same, you don't have to go through the MFA."

110. (C) Comment: A regime hard-liner, Hussein is a very close confidante of President Al-Bashir who chose him as his Minister of the Presidency, then Minister of Interior (during the worst years of the violence in Darfur, violence which he played a role in instigating) and then Defense Minister since 2005. He grew stony-faced during the discussion about SAF actions in Darfur but animated when it shifted to the SPLA. The conversation was as startling as it was revealing: it showed a regime desperately reaching out to the Americans while justifying (mostly) its actions and demonstrated where the heat and attention of the NCP is today, not on Darfur but on its complex and potentially explosive relationship with its Government of National Unity partner, the SPLM, and its military wing. It also revealed a bit of the patronizing racism of Northern Sudanese, coupled with fear, towards the now assertive Southerners. If evidence was ever needed for the value of SST programs in South Sudan, this discussion is proof positive. Although the Minister is not entirely wrong about internal pressures in the South and about the SPLA's aggressive self-confidence, he conveniently ignores the SAF's

own role in using armed proxies against the South and stoking tribal tensions in most of Sudan. End comment.

FERNANDEZ